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Law Suit - Nicaragua

The U.S. government is illegally aiding Nicaraguan rebels and causing the murder and torture of the Central American nation's citizens, according to a lawsuit filed Tuesday by a public interest law firm.

The Center for Constitutional Rights announced it filed the suit in U.S. District Court here on behalf of seven Nicaraguans, Rep. Ronald V. Dellums, D-Calif., and two Florida citizens who maintain that alleged training camps for the rebel forces in the state violate its laws.

The suit seeks \$2 million in damages for each plaintiff and a court order directing the U.S. government to stop the alleged assistance to Nicaraguan rebels.

Defendants in the suit include President Reagan, Secretary of State George P. Shultz, Central Intelligence Agency director William Casey, five other U.S. officials, and a number of individuals and groups allegedly working toward the overthrow of the leftist government of Nicaragua. Reagan left Tuesday on a five-day, four-nation tour of Latin America.

Michael Ratner, a lawyer for the center, told a news conference that the Reagan administration was part of a "wide-ranging conspiracy" to terrorize Nicaraguan citizens and weaken the Central American nation's government.

"This is not some abstract idea of destabilizing the government," he said. "There are people, citizens of Nicaragua who are being harmed, killed, raped, tortured."

Sarah Wunsch, another center lawyer, said the plaintiffs included two women who had lost their husbands in raids on Nicaraguan villages near the Honduras border, a woman raped during such an incident, and a 15-year-old girl who lost an arm in one attack.

The U.S. government has repeatedly refused to comment on news articles maintaining the it is supplying aid to Nicaraguan rebels who were attacking from bases in Honduras.

Assistant Secretary of State Thomas O. Enders, one of the defendants named in the suit, refused to testify before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee last August on whether the United States was aiding Nicaraguan rebels.

State Department spokesman John Hughes said on Nov. 1, "It is the United States government policy not to address reports dealing with intelligence questions or allegations of covert activities."

However, lawyers for the Center for Constitutional Rights pointed to a Nov. 2 article in the New York Times that quoted unnamed Reagan administration officials as saying the CIA was supplying money to rebel groups to harass the Nicaraguan government. However, the officials were reporting as saying the U.S. aid was not intended to overthrow the regime.